

Pandemic Influenza Communications

Secretary's Advisory Committee on Blood Safety and Availability

January 5, 2006
Crystal City, Virginia

Marc Wolfson

Public Affairs Officer

Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

E-mail: marc.wolfson@hhs.gov

Phone: 202-205-1300



Pandemic Influenza

- How will we manage an influenza pandemic?
 - Surveillance
 - Quarantine & isolation
 - Societal interventions (social distancing, close schools, public health practices, etc.)
 - Vaccines
 - Antivirals
- Virus is immune to political boundaries
 - Successful response relies upon successful communications



Pandemic Influenza Communications

- Difference between 1918 and today: 21st century news cycle and new media (cable networks, Web sites, blogs, podcasts, etc)
- **Inform, not inflame**
- **People have a right to know and a need to know the truth so they can make informed decisions**



WHO Pandemic Phases

- **Interpandemic Period**
 - **Phase 1.** No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. An influenza virus subtype that has caused human infection may be present in animals. If present in animals, the risk of human infection or disease is considered to be low
 - **Phase 2.** No new influenza virus subtypes have been detected in humans. However, a circulating animal influenza virus subtype poses a substantial risk of human disease



WHO Pandemic Phases

- **Pandemic Alert Period**
 - **Phase 3. Human infection(s) with a new subtype but no human-to-human spread or at most rare instances of spread to a close contact**
 - **Phase 4. Small cluster(s) with limited human-to-human transmission but spread is highly localized, suggesting that the virus is not well adapted to humans**
 - **Phase 5. Larger cluster(s) but human-to-human spread is still localized, suggesting that the virus is becoming increasingly better adapted to humans but may not yet be fully transmissible (substantial pandemic risk)**



WHO Pandemic Phases

- Pandemic Period
 - **Phase 6.** Pandemic phase: increased and sustained transmission in the general population
- Postpandemic Period
 - Return to the Interpandemic Period (Phase 1)



Sustained Transmission – First 36 Hours

- WHO Phase 4 to Phase 5
 - Localized human to human transmission
 - Tactic – localized containment
 - First 36 hours—media onslaught overwhelming
 - Media: “We have a pandemic”
 - Insatiable demand for credible experts and spokespeople



Containment Communications: Objectives

- Communicate seriousness of human-to-human transmission and prepare public for possibility of virus spread to U.S.
- Inform public about tradeoffs involved in sharing stockpiles
- Manage expectations about likely success of containment overseas.
- Develop and clarify visual and spoken messages.



Containment Communications: Audiences

- Many audiences—just not media
- For example:
 - Health care community (public health, clinicians, nurses, mental health)
 - Business
 - Education
 - Transportation
 - Local communities
 - Other governments



Containment Communications: Key Messages

- **The virus has not been found anywhere in the U.S.**
- **We are working with WHO and other international partners to contain the spread in Southeast Asia.**
- **We are increasing domestic surveillance in the U.S.**
- **We are monitoring passengers coming into the U.S.**
- **We are making preparedness efforts; people should prepare for possible spread to the U.S.**
 - **Here are the steps the U.S. government is taking**
 - **Here are the steps the business community is taking**
 - **Here are the steps that state and local governments are taking**
 - **Here are the steps the public should be taking**



Message Maps

- Risk communication tool used to help organize complex information and make it easier to express current knowledge.
- The development process distills information into easily understood messages written at a 6th grade reading level. Requires both communications and subject matter experts to develop messages.



Message Maps

- Messages are presented in 3 short phrases that convey 3 key messages in 30 words.
 - The approach is based on surveys showing that lead or front page media and broadcast stories usually convey only three key messages usually in less than 9 seconds for broadcast media or less than 30 words for print.



Message Map Example

- **What should people to do if there is an outbreak of pandemic influenza?**
 - **People should stay informed about prevention and control actions.**
 - Public health officials will share information about prevention and control actions.
 - Information about prevention and control actions will be shared in a variety of ways, including through the CDC Hotline and www.pandemicflu.gov
 - Informed public participation and cooperation will be needed for public health efforts.



Message Map Example

- **People should use information about prevention and control actions to care for themselves and their loved ones.**
 - Public health officials will provide information on the signs and symptoms of the specific disease.
 - People should practice good health habits, including eating a balanced diet and getting sufficient rest.
 - People should discuss individual health concerns with their health care provider, health department, or other trusted sources.



Message Map Example

- **People should take common-sense actions to keep from spreading germs.**
 - People should cover their coughs and sneezes, and wash their hands frequently.
 - People should stay away from sick people as much as possible.
 - If you are sick, you should stay away from others as much as possible.



Message Map Example

- **People should stay informed about prevention and control actions, use the information to care for themselves and their loved ones and take common-sense actions to keep from spreading germs.**
 - **30 words that be spoken in a nine second sound bite.**
 - **Always put the most important information at the beginning and the end of the message.**



U.S. Government Lead Roles

- *Department of Health & Human Services*: leads Federal public health communications
- *Department of Agriculture*: leads animal health communications
- *Department of Homeland Security*: leads incident management & communications on societal effects (e.g. transportation, commerce, economy, domestic security, education, etc)

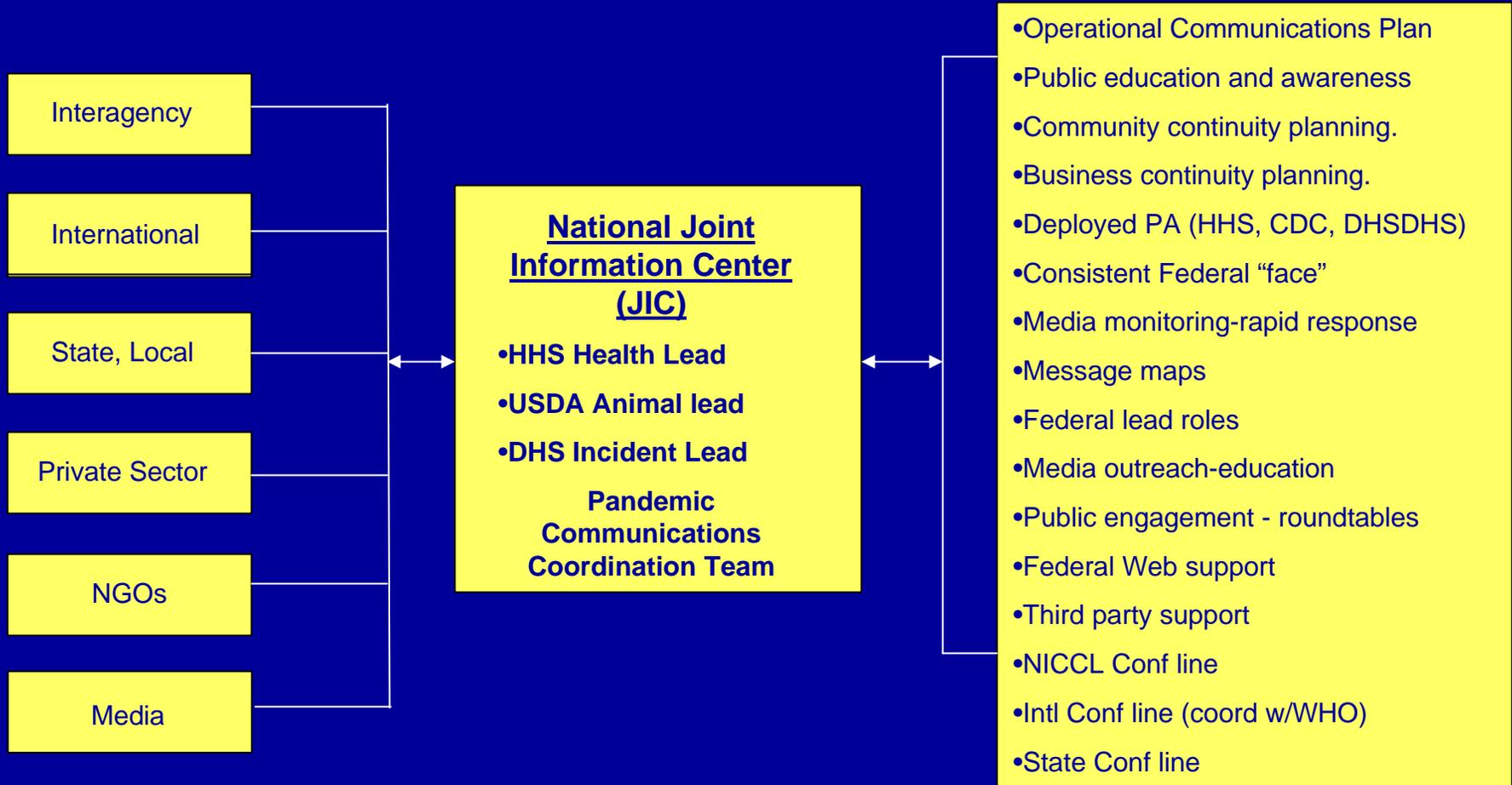


Communications Planning Model

Participants

Coordination

Tasks - Tools



Pandemic Preparedness State Summits

- National Summit - December 5, 2005
- Secretary Leavitt announces plan to hold summits in all 50 states.
- December – Minnesota
- Tomorrow – Arizona
- Future – four more in January, five being scheduled for February



Pandemic Influenza Communications

- **Questions ?**
- **Contact Information:**
 - **Marc Wolfson**
 - Public Affairs Officer
 - Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness
 - U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
 - **E-mail:** marc.wolfson@hhs.gov
 - **Phone:** 202-205-1300

